

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 11068

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, ILO, ICFTU, IS, EG, US
SUBJECT: HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL COMMENTS ON US TRIP
AND MIDDLE EAST PEACE TALKS

REF: TEL AVIV 10440

1. SUMMARY: HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL MESHEL
CHARACTERIZED HIS MEETINGS WITH EGYPTIAN AND OTHER
ARAB TRADE UNION LEADERS AT THE AFL-CIO CONVENTION IN
LOS ANGELES AS A TURNING POINT IN INTERNATIONAL LABOR
RELATIONS AND SAID THAT AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED TO
ESTABLISH REGULAR CONTACTS THROUGH THE AFL-CIO AND THE
HISTADRUT REPRESENTATIVE IN THE US. EXCHANGE VISITS
BETWEEN HISTADRUT AND EGYPTIAN LABOR LEADERS WOULD HAVE
TO AWAIT FURTHER PROGRESS IN THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.
MESHEL PRAISED NOT ONLY SADAT'S COURAGE, BUT ALSO
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BEGIN FOR HIS REMARKABLE LEADERSHIP AND ABILITY TO SHED
RIGID IDEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS, PARTICULARLY REGARDING
THE WEST BANK. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN, HOWEVER,
OVER THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE PEACE TALKS MAY FAIL AND SAID
THAT THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR ISRAEL, EGYPT AND
THE MIDDLE EAST WOULD BE CRITICAL. END SUMMARY.

2. HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL YERUCHAM MESHEL TOLD LABATT ON DECEMBER 23 THAT HE CONSIDERED HIS MEETING WITH EGYPTIAN LABOR LEADER SAAD MOHAMED ACHMAD AND OTHER ARAB LABOR LEADERS AS A MAJOR TURNING POINT IN INTERNATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS. HE FELT THAT SUCH CONTACTS AND EFFORTS TO REACH MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARAB LABOR LEADERS WAS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE PEACE MAKING PROCESS. HE GAVE AFL-CIO PRESIDENT GEROME MEANY FULL CREDIT FOR MAKING POSSIBLE HIS PUBLIC ENCOUNTER WITH ACHMAD AT THE LOS ANGELES CONVENTION, WHICH EVEN UPSTAGED VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE. HE ALSO COMMENTED THAT HIS SUBSEQUENT PRIVATE TALKS WITH ACHMAD AND LABOR LEADERS FROM JORDAN, LEBANON, AND THE SUDAN HAD BEEN FRUITFUL AND RESULTED IN AN AGREEMENT TO ARRANGE MEETINGS AND EXCHANGES OF MESSAGE THROUGH THE ASIAN AMERICAN FREE LABOR INSTITUTE (AAFLI) OF THE AFL-CIO AND THE US HISTADRUT REPRESENTATIVE YA'ACOV COHEN (WHO SPEAKS ARABIC AND ACTED AS MESHEL'S INTERPRETER). ACHAMAD ACKNOWLEDGED THE HISTADRUT INVITATION FOR AN EXCHANGE OF CONTACTS WHICH HAD BEEN EXTENDED THROUGH PRESIDENT SADAT DURING HIS VISIT TO JERUSALEM. HOWEVER, HE SAID THAT FORMAL TRADE UNION EXCHANGE VISIT BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO AWAIT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PEACE TALKS, BUT INFORMAL EXCHANGES IN THE US AND ELSEWHERE WERE ACCEPTABLE.

3. MESHEL THEN COMMENTED ABOUT HOW HE HAD BEEN CARRIED
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AWAY IN LOS ANGELES BY THE EMOTIONS OF THE MOMENT AND BY THE DELEGATES CHEERING HIM AND ACHMAD. THIS HAD BEEN THE REASON WHY IN PRAISING SADAT'S COURAGE HE HAD INADVERTENTLY OMITTED PRAISING BEGIN EQUALLY FOR HIS COURAGE AND LEADERSHIP.

4. COMMENTING ON BEGIN, MESHEL STRESSED THAT HE FULLY SUPPORTED THE PRIME MINISTER'S PEACE EFFORTS AND ADMIRER HIM FOR HIS ABILITY TO RISE TO THE OCCASION AND TO SHED OLD IDEOLOGICAL FORMULAS AND SHIBBOLETHS. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT A MAN LIKE BEGIN COULD EVEN ENVISAGE YIELDING ON THE WEST BANK. HE IS NOW WAY AHEAD OF ANY PLANS PROPOSED BY THE LABOR PARTY. NOW BEGIN AND SADAT HAVE GONE SO FAR AND HAVE UNLEASHED SUCH PUBLIC OPINION AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES AND EXPECTATIONS THAT HE SAW NO ALTERNATIVES FOR BOTH MEN BUT TO ARRIVE AT SOME PEACE FORMULA.

5. MESHEL NEXT EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT BECAUSE BEGIN IS ACTING VIRTUALLY ALONE, RELEGATING EVEN MOSHE DAYAN TO A SECONDARY ROLE, HE MAY MAKE A SERIOUS MISTAKE. HE THEN MUSED WHETHER BEGIN'S SUDDEN TRIP TO WASHINGTON AT

HIS OWN INITIATIVE HAD BEEN WISE AND HOW HE WOULD HANDLE THE CRUCIAL TALKS WITH SADAT IN ISMAILIA ON DECEMBER 25. NOBODY IN ISRAEL WANTED EVEN TO THINK OF THE CONSEQUENCES IF THESE TWO MEN FAILED TO COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING. FAILURE WOULD OPEN UP ALL THE INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS AND POLITICAL RIVALRIES BOTH IN ISRAEL AND IN EGYPT AND WOULD DISCOURAGE RESUMPTION OF ANY PEACE INITIATIVE FOR A LONG TIME TO COME. MESHEL DOUBTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT, FOR EXAMPLE, COULD HAVE MANAGED POPULAR OPPOSITION TO ITS NEW ECONOMIC POLICY IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE ATMOSPHERE CREATED BY THE SADAT VISIT TO JERUSALEM.

6. IN CONCLUSION, MESHEL SAID THAT AT THE AFL-CIO CONVENTION EVERYBODY HAD TRIED TO GET INTO THE ACT OF PRO-CONFIDENTIAL

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MOTING ISRAELI-ARAB CONTACTS. HE HAD OFFERS FROM THE GERMANS, OTTO KERSTEN OF THE ICFTU, THE SCANDINAVIANS, AUSTRIANS, AND OTHERS. NOW THAT THE ICE HAS BEEN BROKEN, EVERYONE WANTED TO PARTICIPATE. HE HAD BEEN RATHER IMPATIENT WITH THESE EFFORTS, BUT HAD GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED THE AFL-CIO INTERMEDIARY ROLE. ALTHOUGH MESHEL DID NOT WANT TO QUOTE MEANY DIRECTLY, HE SAID THAT HE HAD GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT THE AFL-CIO WAS NOW INCREASINGLY INCLINED TO REJOIN THE ICFTU AND HE (MESHEL) WAS ALSO HOPEFUL THAT THE US WOULD RETURN TO THE ILO.
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